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ABSTRACT

The digest examines the supply and the quality of special education personnel and notes problems in the area of personnel preparation. Statistics are cited to show that the current supply of qualified personnel does not meet demand, particularly in such important areas as special education. Similarly, efforts in recent years to strengthen the quality of teacher preparation programs in colleges and universitites are noted. The "quandry" facing special education because of the limited numbers of available persons and the large numbers of uncertified and untrained personnel in some areas is discussed. Further difficulties are traced to low salary levels and diminishing popular respect for the teaching profession. The digest concludes with a statement emphasizing the connections of quality and quantity in personnel matters to the nation's problems in education. (CL)

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# PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: QUANTITY VERSUS QUALITY

"A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform," the 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, depicted a growing trend toward mediocrity in the American education system and advanced a set of recommendations to reverse this trend, among them: more rigorous instruction; greater emphasis on math, science, and basic skills; more stringent requirements for entry into teacher training; and improvement in teacher education programs. One aspect of the problem that perhaps was not examined closely by the Commission is the reciprocal relationship between quantity and quality of personnel—an issue which, in and of itself, may help to account for the educational bad news that has become a national concern.

## Quantity

Approximately 2,380,000 teachers are employed in the United States today. Of this number, 6 percent (or around 142,800) leave the profession each year. Although public school enrollments have declined in the last decade, census figures show that the school-aged population will again begin to burgeon in the mid to late 1980's. Moreover, though the overall enrollment did decline in the 1970's, the number of students identified as handicapped increased. By the end of this decade, it is estimated that the demand for new teachers to fill all roles will be 200,000 per year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1983).

Among colleges and universities in the United States, 1227 (or 70 percent) have teacher education programs. Most of these programs have been experiencing a gradual decline in enrollment (Freistritzer, 1983). The number of new teachers who graduated from these programs was 313,000 in 1972-73, but only 141,000 in 1980-81 (Kluender, 1984). Among the nation's teacher education programs, approximately 698 are engaged in preparing special education personnel (Geiger, 1983), and one-tenth of all bachelor's degrees awarded in education in 1980-81 were in special education.

The overall supply of teachers produced annually is already 4 percent short of demand (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1983). The greatest shortages are in math, physics, vocational education, bilingual education, and special education. The most pressing needs reported by school districts are for occupational therapists; physical therapists; speech clinicians; personnel to work with students who are emotionally disturbed, behavior disordered, severely retarded, severely emotionally disturbed, multiply handicapped, visually handicapped, or hearing impaired; and personnel for special education in the secondary schools (Smith-Davis, Burke, & Noel, 1984; Schofer & Duncan, 1982).

These data demonstrate the reality that the current supply of qualified personnel does not meet demand, particularly in such important areas of instruction as special education. As the school-aged population increases, as college and university enrollments in teacher education diminish, and as other job markets open up, insufficient numbers of personnel will become an even greater problem.

## Quality

In recent years (and, in most cases, prior to the report of the National Commission on Excellence report), 85 percent of colleges and universities offering preparation in teacher education have initiated efforts to improve the quality of their programs by upgrading the curriculum (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1983), by lengthening the teacher education program to five years, and/or by expanding the clinical and field experience components of their programs (Kluender, 1984). Seventy-four percent of these colleges and universities have increased admissions standards (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1983).

In some instances, higher standards for teacher trainee admission, retention, and graduation have come about as a result of state requirements. Thirty states have passed legislation or mandates that require the use of a test for admission to teacher training and/or for certification upon completion of training; in 12 other states, planning is in progress for similar changes (Sandefur, 1984).

In special education, personnel preparation programs have been greatly enhanced in the past decade by these and other steps. Among the new strengths in preservice training programs in special education are greater emphasis on trainee acquisition of competency objectives, as evidenced by the trainee's ability to effect change in learners; greater collaboration with interdisciplinary professions and parents; and improved field-based training with clinical supervision and the measurement of performance objectives.

## The Quandary

Any limitation on numbers of available personnel promotes mediocrity because it limits selectivity. In special education, the already existing shortages are constraining selectivity in hiring. Indeed, "in special education, the most widespread solution to problems of personnel shortages and recruitment problems is the issuance of certificates to persons who do not demonstrate the preparation, experience, qualifications, and other criteria ordinarily used for certification. Up to 30 percent of the personnel in some jurisdictions are thus working with children with whom they have had minimal experience or preparation, and no jurisdiction is free of the need for provisionally certified personnel" (Smith-Davis, Burke, & Noel, 1984, p. 230).

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The further impact of teacher tests, higher recruitment standards, competency-based credentialing, and other innovations introduces a further juncture where issues of quality and quantity converge. When teacher tests and stringent graduation requirements discourage marginal individuals from seeking entry into teacher training and the profession, these measures have been successful in their functions as screening and selection devices. However

> It is reportedly possible, when occasioned by severe shortages of certain personnel, for officials to maneuver the competency criteria of a teacher test in the effort to ensure that some reasonable number of new teachers will pass it in a given year. In other words, competency expectations can be moved up and down to reflect supply and demand—and teachers, like wine, will perhaps be said to have been produced in vintage years and bad years. (Smith-Davis, Burke, & Noel, 1984, p. 48)

Meanwhile, higher education must deal with the continuing decline in teacher trainee enrollment at the same time that it endeavors to raise its admission standards, the quality of its programs, and its graduation criteria.

A major factor in decisions not to choose a teaching career is the low salary level (Brederson, Fruth, & Kasten, 1983; Page & Page, 1982; Cresap, McCormick, & Paget, 1984). According to reports from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Endicott, and the College Placement Council, beginning salaries for teachers with a bachelor's degree are lower than in any other professional occupation.

The depopularization of public education in politics and the press also reportedly discourages many high caliber individuals from entering the profession. In 1969, 75 percent of respondents in a Gallup poll said they would like their children to become teachers. By the time of the 1983 Gallup poll, only 45 percent of respondents wanted their offspring to become teachers (Cresap, McCormick, & Paget, 1984). Out of the effort to rivet public attention on the mediocrity ascribed to public education, perhaps a self-fulfilling prophecy is evolving.

Under the prevailing conditions, higher education's potentially greater selectivity in admissions, retention, and graduation stands to further limit the available personnel who are and will be needed, and thereby limit the selectivity of employers. If we desire not only to have enough teachers but also to have good ones, higher education cannot be held exclusively accountable for both goals. Colleges and universities cannot alone guarantee a teacher for every vacant position in every school everywhere, as long as other factors create shortages for both trainees and teachers. What colleges and universities can and should guarantee is that every special education graduate is indeed an accomplished professional. What states, districts, and national policy makers should guarantee are the incentives and conditions that will make education an attractive, lucrative, promising, and respectable profession. Until issues of quality can be disentangled from problems of quantity, the overall excellence of teacher education and its graduates will be impeded, and the tide of mediocrity in the public schools will continue to rise.

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## Resources

Available from the Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Drive, Reston VA 22091

*Professional Standards and Code of Ethics in Special Education*. 32pp. Single copies, free; packet of 25, $10.00.


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